



# *No Child Left Behind: What's in It for Parents*

*by Anne T. Henderson*



# *A Guide for Parent Leaders and Advocates*

## **Who we are**

We are Parent Leadership Associates, a collaboration between KSA-Plus Communications and the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence.

The Prichard Committee has been the catalyst behind school improvement in Kentucky for more than two decades. It created citizen demand for new policies and helped bring them about. Through its Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL), the Prichard Committee has educated an army of parents who understand how schools need to change and who now have the leadership skills to help educators make and sustain improvements.

KSA-Plus Communications is the nation's leading firm in communicating the complexities of school improvement in clear language and powerful images, and in helping education and community leaders build the public support necessary for high-achieving schools. KSA-Plus is based in the Washington, D.C., area with offices around the country.

Through Parent Leadership Associates, we offer communities, parents and educators the assistance they need to improve schools for all children.

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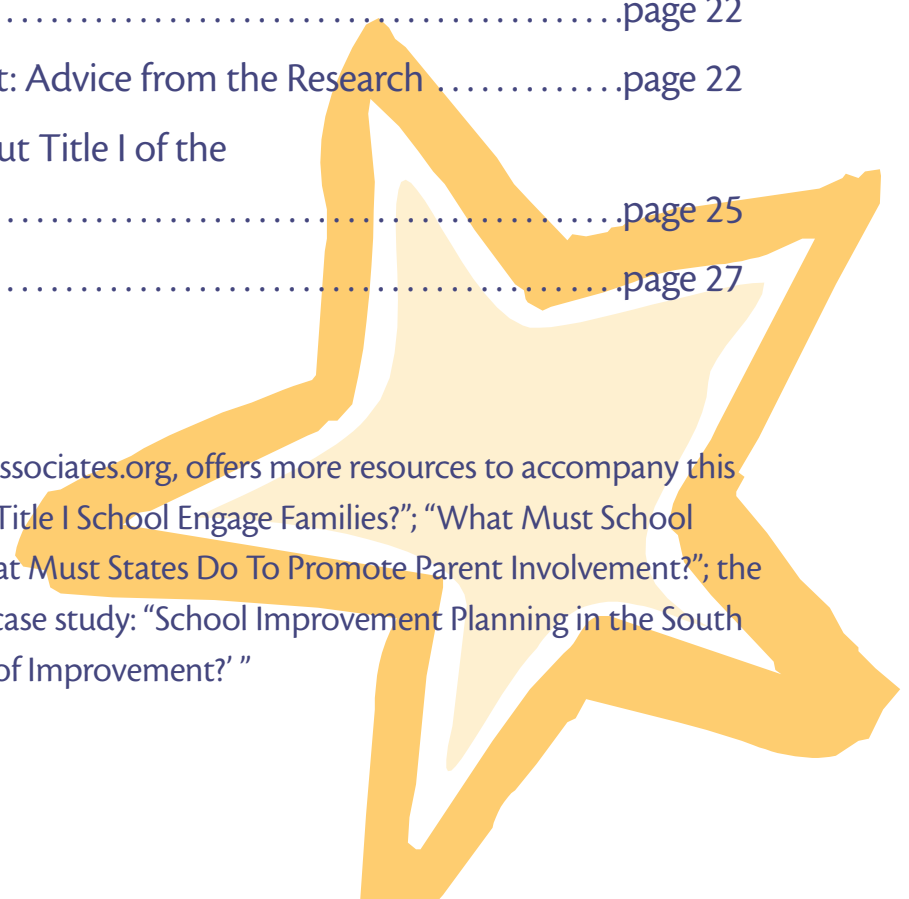
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The Parent Leadership Associates Web site, [www.plassociates.org](http://www.plassociates.org), offers more resources to accompany this publication. Visit the Web site to find “How Must a Title I School Engage Families?”; “What Must School Districts Do To Promote Parent Involvement?”; “What Must States Do To Promote Parent Involvement?”; the full text of Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act; a case study: “School Improvement Planning in the South Bronx”; and “What if Your Child’s School Is ‘In Need of Improvement?’ ”



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## Foreword



In 2001, Congress passed far-reaching legislation called the No Child Left Behind Act. This new law made major changes to federal education programs, including Title I. Title I is the largest federal program for elementary and secondary education, and will provide about \$12 billion a year to school districts for educating low-income students.

The new law requires states to set high standards for student achievement and, using tests tied to these standards, assess children's progress in meeting them. Parents and the public will learn about school and district performance through annual report cards issued by the state education agency and local school districts. Schools that do not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in improving achievement will be held accountable by their district and the state. Families whose children attend schools with Title I funds will have the option of transferring their children to a higher-performing school if the school does not make adequate progress for two years in a row. States and school districts must put highly qualified teachers in every classroom by fall 2005.

In this new accountability structure, parents are to be involved at each point in the process. The annual school and district report cards must be in a language and format that parents can understand. Moreover, additional rules apply to districts and schools that receive Title I funds. Each Title I school and district must write a parent involvement policy that has been developed with and agreed upon by parents. In the policy, a *district* must describe how parents will be involved in developing plans to improve schools

and engage families. The law also is very specific about how parents must be involved in schools that receive Title I funds.

The emphasis on increased parent involvement is good public policy. The latest in a series of reports published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, reviews recent research on how engaging families can improve outcomes for students. When schools support parents to be more involved in their children's learning — no matter what the families' income, education level or ethnic background — children are more likely to:

- earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs;
- be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits;
- attend school regularly;
- have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school; and
- graduate from high school and go on to postsecondary education.

Several studies also strongly suggest that school improvement initiatives are more effective when they include outreach to families. Schools and school districts confronted by the challenge of the No Child Left Behind Act likely will be more successful if they embrace the parent involvement provisions and work with families to improve student achievement.

This guide tries to set out what anyone interested in education needs to know about this

important new law. Chapter 1 reviews the basics of the law and how its major features relate to each other. Chapter 2 discusses six major leverage points that parents and community members can use to press for a high-quality education for their children. Chapter 3 looks at the many requirements in the law to engage parents. For each leverage point, we suggest specific steps parents should take to ensure that their local schools are actually doing what the new law requires them to do. Additional resources are at the end of the report.

For more information on NCLB, including the complete text of Title I, section 1118, on parent involvement, please visit [www.plassociates.org](http://www.plassociates.org). Other resources available on the Web site include: "How Must a Title I School Engage Families?"; "What Must School Districts Do To Promote Parent Involvement?"; "What Must States Do To Promote Parent Involvement?"; a case study: "School Improvement Planning in the South Bronx"; and "What if Your Child's School Is 'In Need of Improvement?' "





# *What Is No Child Left Behind?*

**T**he No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is a new name for an old law. It's the latest amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Originally passed in 1965, ESEA was the first major federal aid program for local public schools. Congress has revised the act about every five years, and most presidents have put their stamp on it. NCLB is the name for the strict accountability changes that President George W. Bush proposed to the law, many of which were enacted by Congress in 2001. The president signed the law in January 2002.

NCLB is divided into nine titles. The most important is Title I, which will provide about \$12 billion a year in federal aid to local school districts to help them educate low-income children. In the early years of Title I, money flowed from Washington to school districts with few requirements except to cover the extra costs of educating children from poor families. By the early 1970s, reports revealed that the program was not helping poor children, but was being used for purposes such as installing air conditioning in a superintendent's office and building a water treatment plant.

As Congress tightened the law, Title I became a program that targeted funds to schools with higher numbers of low-income children. School districts had to account strictly for the funds, so they often created "pull-out" programs, where children were taken out of class for remedial instruction by teachers paid out of Title I funds. By the mid-1980s, the program had unintentionally created a bottom track for poor children, and was not improving student achievement.

Important changes were made to the law in 1994 to align the Title I program with the growing national movement to strengthen academic

## **Is Your Child in a Title I School?**

Many of the new provisions in NCLB apply only to schools that have a Title I program. If your child is in a Title I school, you now have much more leverage to be involved in decisions that affect your children. The first step is to determine if your child is in a school receiving Title I funds. About 48,000 public schools (58 percent of all U.S. public schools) receive Title I funds, according to the U.S. Department of Education. The program serves some 12.4 million public school students: 35 percent of whom are white, 31 percent Hispanic, 27 percent African American, 4 percent Asian/Pacific Islanders and 1 percent "other."

Title I funds flow to nearly all school districts and are targeted to schools with high numbers of children from low-income families. Most districts rank their schools by proportion of low-

income children (those eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) and distribute the funds to schools where the number of poor children is above the district average. If the number of low-income students is above 40 percent, the school may use Title I funds to create a *schoolwide* program to improve achievement, thereby serving all children in the school. If it is below 40 percent, the school must target its assistance to the lowest-achieving students.

Ask the principal or teachers if your school has a Title I program. Every Title I school is supposed to have an annual meeting for parents to inform them about the program. Does your school have such a meeting? If you do not get a clear answer about your school's status, call your district's Title I office and ask for a list of all school that receive Title I funds.

standards. Every state receiving Title I funds (and all do) had to create new, higher standards for all children. Title I funds had to be used to help low-income children attain the same standards that all children were expected to reach. States had to buy or develop their own tests to measure how well the children were meeting the standards.

In 1994, Title I schools were required to provide:

- an accelerated curriculum to help low-income students meet the new standards;
- effective instructional strategies that work for all students;
- “high-quality” professional staff;
- extra help that is both “timely and effective” for students who are having trouble learning to the standards; and
- opportunities for parents to help plan Title I programs and develop policies to involve parents in the program and in their children’s learning.

States have had mixed success in meeting these new requirements (see box at right).

## How Does NCLB Work?

The NCLB law has several key elements that apply to *all* public schools, Title I and non-Title I alike.

**Standards:** All states are required to set challenging standards for what children should know and be able to do in reading, math and science at various grade levels.

**Assessments:** All states must develop or use assessments in reading, math and science to test whether children have met the state’s standards. All children, not just those in Title I schools,

must take the tests. The tests must be tied to the standards.

**Report Cards:** Each school must produce reports for individual students that explain what their scores mean. In addition, states and school districts are required to publish annual report cards for all public schools. These must include data on school and student performance, schools identified as needing improvement, graduation rates, and teacher qualifications.

**High-Quality Teachers and Reading Programs:** By 2005, all classroom teachers must be highly qualified. Elementary school teachers must have a bachelor’s degree and pass a rigorous test in core subjects. Middle and high school teachers must show competency in their subject by passing a test or by completing an academic major, a graduate degree or comparable coursework. These requirements already apply to all *new hires*. In addition, primary reading programs (kindergarten–third grade) must be designed using “scientifically based” reading research. Paraprofessionals (such as teacher aides) also must be qualified (completed two years of college or passed a state or local test) by the 2005–06 school year. If any student has been assigned to or taught for four or more consecutive weeks by a teacher who is not highly qualified, the district must notify that student’s parents.

**Adequate Yearly Progress:** All schools must make AYP in student improvement, toward a goal of all students meeting the reading and math standards by 2014. Title I schools that states certify as not making adequate progress are subject to sanctions, and parents may transfer their children to other, better-performing public schools at district expense. If they do not improve in following years, these failing schools also must

## Which States Complied?

Only 11 states — Delaware, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia and Wyoming — met the 1994 Title I requirements to strengthen their academic standards, curriculums, instructional strategies, teaching quality and student support systems:

Other states either received conditional approval, were given more time or were told to strengthen certain aspects of their plans.

Source: *High Standards for All Students*, U.S. Department of Education, January 2001

arrange for supplemental services for children who lag behind.

Title I funds are used primarily to support teaching and can be spent for professional development, additional teachers to reduce class size, specialists in reading and math, paraprofessionals to tutor and assist students, and school reform programs. (Parents must be involved in deciding how to spend these funds.) The funds are to provide a high level of instruction so that all students can meet high standards. All *new* Title I teachers (hired in the 2002–03 school year) must be “highly qualified,” defined as fully certified by the state. States also must develop plans to ensure that *all* teachers, not just new hires, will be



“highly qualified” by the end of the 2005–06 school year.

To clarify the law for readers who have been involved in Title I and want to know what has been added, the next two charts compare key provisions of NCLB to the 1994 Title I law.

**Loopholes:** At least two loopholes have emerged in these NCLB provisions. First, states define their own standards and AYP targets. Some states have set the proficiency bar much lower than others. In the first year of implementation, some states have not identified any schools as “failing,” while others have designated several hundred.

Second, districts with failing schools may have few places for students to transfer. Several large urban districts have identified only a limited number of available slots to which students in failing schools may transfer. In addition, some districts have placed restrictions, such as a three-mile limit, on the distance that students may be transported.

Provision	1994 Law (P.L. 103-382)	NCLB (P.L. 107-110)
Standards and Accountability	All states must develop challenging standards in at least reading and math. Standards are to be developed and aligned to state tests by the 2001–02 school year.	States must complete their standards and assessments in reading and math by 2002–03, or face losing their Title I administrative funds. States must develop science standards by 2005–06.
Assessment	All <i>Title I students</i> must be tested at three grade levels in reading and math to ensure they meet the same state standards that all children are expected to meet.	By 2005–06, <i>all public school students</i> , including those in charter schools, must be tested in reading and math each year in grades three through eight, and at least once between grades nine and 12. By 2007–08, states must add a science test at three grade levels. The tests must be aligned with the state standards and use various measures of achievement, not just multiple-choice questions. States also must assess the English proficiency of all students with limited English skills, starting in 2002–03. Students in private, religious or home schools do not have to be tested.  Also, starting in 2002–03, all states must give the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to representatives subgroups of students in grades four, eight and 12. NAEP scores will serve as a national benchmark and reality check on each state’s standards and tests. For instance, if students do well on the state test, but not on NAEP, it may mean that the state’s standards are too low or its test is too easy.
Report Cards	No requirements.	States and school districts must create and distribute annual report cards beginning in the 2002–03 school year. The report cards must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ data on school and student performance;</li> <li>■ percentage of students not tested;</li> <li>■ schools needing improvement;</li> <li>■ graduation rates; and</li> <li>■ teacher qualifications.</li> </ul> Performance data must be broken down by subgroups of students (income level, gender, ethnicity, language, migrant status and disabilities).

Provision	1994 Law (P.L. 103-382)	NCLB (P.L. 107-110)
Adequate Yearly Progress	<p>States define AYP for <i>Title I</i> schools and districts.</p> <p>Sets goal that all Title I students should achieve a “proficient” rating on state assessments, based on the state standards.</p>	<p>States must apply AYP to <i>all</i> public schools, not just Title I schools.</p> <p>Progress must be defined so that in 12 years (by 2014), all students are proficient in at least reading and math.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Schools must set the bar based on the lowest-achieving group of students. For instance, the initial goal could be to reduce the number of students at the lowest level by 5 percent and increase the number at the proficient level by 3 percent.</li> <li>■ The bar must be raised after two years, and at least every three years after that.</li> <li>■ All subgroups of students must make progress each year, and 95 percent of each group must take the test.</li> </ul>
Breaking Down the Data	<p><i>Title I</i> schools must break down achievement data into subgroups of students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ minorities;</li> <li>■ low-income;</li> <li>■ English language learners; and</li> <li>■ disabilities.</li> </ul> <p>Gains are not required by subgroup.</p>	<p><i>All</i> schools must break data down by subgroups (minorities, low-income, gender, migrant status, language and disabilities).</p> <p>Each subgroup must show gains for the school to meet the AYP requirement.</p>
School Improvement and Corrective Action	<p>School districts use assessment results to review school progress. The district must provide technical assistance to Title I schools that fail to meet AYP. The district also may take corrective action.</p>	<p>School districts use assessment results to review all schools’ progress. Title I schools that fail to meet AYP are identified for corrective action and placed in “school improvement” status.</p> <p>This triggers a timetable of interventions and consequences: allowing students to transfer to higher-performing schools (with transportation provided); offering outside supplemental services (tutoring, after-school programs, etc.) to students who don’t transfer; working with parents to develop a school improvement plan; requiring schools to spend at least 10 percent of their Title I funds to improve teaching quality; or establishing an alternative governance structure, which can include replacing the principals and/or staff, reopening as a charter school, being turned over to a private management company (such as Edison Schools), or being taken over by the state. Parents must be clearly informed of their options.</p> <p>(See “If a School Is ‘In Need of Improvement’: Schedule of Actions,” page 16.)</p>



## Chapter 2



# Six Key Leverage Points for Parent Involvement in Title I Schools

If parents and community members know their rights and make their priorities known, schools and districts are far more likely to carry out the Title I parent involvement requirements effectively. The law provides for substantive parent involvement at every level of the Title I program, from the local school to the state. This section identifies several key points in the process where parents and community members can intervene to help improve their school.

Each leverage point describes what the law says; what to look for; and steps you can take to make sure that your school, district and state both consult with and respond to parents. For more detail about parent involvement requirements in the law, see the resource section on the PLA Web site ([www.plassociates.org](http://www.plassociates.org)).

The new law is very clear about the importance of engaging families in the Title I program. The opening paragraph of Section 1118 lays out the major parent involvement provisions:

*A (school district) may receive (federal) funds under this part only if such agency implements programs, activities, and procedures for the involvement of parents in programs assisted under this part . . . . Such programs, activities, and procedures shall be planned and implemented with meaningful consultation with parents of participating children. [emphasis added]*

Moreover, each school district must reserve **not less than 1 percent** of its total Title I grant to support activities to engage parents. The district must distribute 95 percent or more of these funds directly to the Title I schools, rather than using them at the district level. Both the district and schools may decide to spend more to support parent training, communication and information. Parents of children participating in the Title I program must be involved in deciding how these funds will be used. Details on funding can be found in “Follow the Money” on page 10.

**Leverage Point #1: School Parent Involvement Policy. Every Title I school must have a written parent involvement**

**policy, developed with and approved by parents. This policy should spell out how parents will be involved in a meaningful way in making decisions about the program and how they will be involved in the school. The policy must be updated periodically to reflect the changing concerns of parents.**

### What the law says

The policy must cover three main areas: policy development, shared responsibility for student achievement, and capacity of staff and parents to work together. The policy must be in a language and format that parents can understand.

## Having a Voice in School Improvement

The bottom line is that students do better when parents are actively involved in shaping school improvement plans (see “Engaging Families to Improve Achievement: Advice from the Research,” page 22). As a parent leader, you want to be at the table when your school or district is addressing such issues as: closing achievement gaps between different groups of students, strategizing how to recruit and keep well-qualified teachers, or committing to eliminate low-level programs and giving all children challenging work. The leverage points described in this chapter will help ensure that you have a seat at the decisionmaking table — as a real partner in school improvement.

- **Policy Development:** The policy must provide for parents to be involved in an “organized, ongoing, and timely way” in developing the school’s parent involvement policy and in developing its Title I program. Parents should be consulted on major decisions about how to use Title I funds, such as whether to hire more teachers to reduce class size, adopt a whole school reform program (and which one), hire paraprofessional teacher aides, and/or create a family resource center.

At an annual meeting for parents, the school must explain the Title I program, as well as parents’ rights to be involved in the program. The school should hold additional meetings after that to get parents’ suggestions and discuss key decisions. The law says that the school must respond to parents’ suggestions “as soon as practically possible.” In addition, the school should help parents attend the meetings by offering supports like transportation, food and child care.

- **Shared Responsibility, or the School-Parent Compact:** The policy also must include a copy of a school-parent compact that describes how the school will work with parents to improve achievement. The policy should state the goals of the compact and describe a process for creating the compact in consultation with parents. The compact should be revised periodically to reflect changing concerns of parents. (More detail on the compact is included in Leverage Point #2.)
- **Knowledge and Skills of Educators and Parents:** The policy also should address

## Applying These Rules to *All* Schools

Except for Leverage Point #4 (Report Cards), this chapter describes provisions of the new federal law that apply only to districts and schools receiving federal Title I funds. There is no reason, however, why all districts and schools shouldn’t adopt these guidelines. If your child is in a non-Title I school, work with other parents to get your local school board to apply these policies to every school in the district. As described in the resource section at the end of this report, students perform better in districts and schools with more parent involvement. That is exactly what these new rules are designed to encourage. As you read this chapter, ask yourself: Is there anything here that I would not want for my own school or district?

helping parents understand the state’s standards and the school’s curriculum, as well as how children will be assessed. The school should offer information and training about monitoring a child’s progress and working with teachers to improve their children’s achievement. Staff should get training on the importance of working with parents as equal partners. The law suggests that parents be involved in that staff training. (For specific information about effective practices to include in the school policy, compact and training, see “Engaging Parents to Improve Student Achievement: Advice from the Research,” page 22.)

### Steps to Take

1. Get a copy of your school’s parent involvement policy and see whether it covers all points required in the law. What other activities does the school offer to support parents?
2. Find out what parents think about the policy and whether it covers their concerns. Ask them how it could be stronger. What kind of supports do they want from the school to help them be more involved, both in improving the program and in helping their children?
3. Update the policy and make it as specific as possible. The policy should:
  - Describe the process for obtaining parent input and approval of both the policy and the school’s Title I program plan.
  - Describe how the school-parent compact will be developed and approved (see Leverage Point #2 for more information about the compact).
  - Specify what kind of parent training will be offered and when. Spell out how parents will be consulted about what training is needed.

- Set a schedule for regular meetings between parents and educators (teachers, administrators and other school staff). Describe what will be provided to make meetings and other events convenient and accessible to families — such as flexible times, transportation and child care — and the topics that reflect the interests of families.
- 4. Find out what training is available and when. Take part in the training that is offered and ask for additional training and other information as needed. Recruit other parents to attend training.

**Leverage Point #2: School-Parent Compact.** Every *Title I* school must have a school-parent compact, developed with and approved by parents, that describes how the school and parents will build a partnership to improve student achievement. This compact should explain how the school will meet the needs of its students so that they will achieve high standards.

### What the law says

“Each school ... shall jointly develop with parents for all children served (by the Title I program) a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement, and the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help children achieve the state’s high standards.”

A compact should be a basic agreement negotiated between the school and its families, not just a

laundry list of things teachers and parents should do. Developing a compact is an opportunity to discuss important goals and how parents and school staff will work together to reach them.

### The School’s Responsibilities

The compact must describe how the school will “provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment” to enable students to meet the state’s academic standards. The compact should cover what the school will do in these areas:

- Make sure that veteran teachers and para-professionals are fully qualified (have a bachelor’s degree and pass a rigorous state test) by the 2005–06 school year. All new teachers must be “highly qualified” starting now.
- Ensure the high quality of its curriculum and instruction.
- Monitor all children’s progress carefully.
- Eliminate low-level classes and programs so that all students get challenging work and high-quality instruction
- Report regularly (more than once a year) to families on how the school is improving student progress.
- Create an effective working relationship with every family, such as by giving parents more opportunity to meet one-on-one with teachers and lending learning materials to use at home.

### Parent-Teacher Communications

The law says that the compact must cover the importance of communication between teachers and parents on an ongoing basis. At a minimum, elementary schools should have annual parent

teacher conferences to discuss how to use the compact to improve the child’s achievement. In addition, the school should make sure that teachers make frequent reports to parents on their children’s progress, and they should provide reasonable access to school staff.

### Steps to Take

Make sure your school’s compact covers what is needed to help all children achieve to high standards. Revise it, if necessary, to include these points.

1. Be clear about how the school will provide a supportive and effective learning environment for all students. For example, will children get extra help as soon as they need it? What kind of help? Will the school offer staff development for teachers? Will it adopt a whole-school reform program such as Success for All, Accelerated Schools or the School Development Program?
2. Specify how teachers will keep parents informed about how their children are doing. Will students get effective help if they need it, as soon as they need it? Is the goal of this help to make sure they catch up fully with their classmates? What support will teachers give families to help their children at home?
3. Define the terms of parent-teacher collaboration. What does “reasonable access” to staff mean? How easy is it for parents to observe and volunteer in classrooms? What hours will the principal be available to meet with parents? When will teachers be available to talk with parents? What are the security procedures for visits to the school?



## Follow the Money

For parents to become effective partners in improving schools and raising student achievement, they will need training, information and support. Title I provides many resources to school districts for engaging families, both in supporting their children's learning and in working to improve schools.

At a minimum, the law requires that 1 percent of the district's total grant may be spent on efforts to engage parents. Ninety-five percent of this must be passed directly to local schools. Both districts and schools may spend more, and parents must be involved in deciding how these funds should be spent.

How the funds are distributed and spent will depend on your district's funding structure. In districts with school-based budgeting, school councils will play a key role in deciding how to use the school's Title I funds, including its share of the 1 percent pass-through funds. Many schools use Title I funds to hire extra teachers to reduce class size and provide extra instruction in reading and math to students. Schools also use the funds to purchase staff development training; to adopt a whole-school reform program (such as Success for All, Accelerated Schools or the School Development Program); to purchase curriculum materials; and to hire paraprofessionals to serve as tutors and classroom aides. Parents should be involved in all these decisions, and should make sure that the school budgets an adequate amount for parent involvement, including training.

Although each Title I school can offer its own training, it is more effective when school districts take the lead. Districts should make available a training program of consistent quality for parents in all Title I schools. School districts also should train

staff serving as parent liaisons in schools to give parents good information about standards, assessments, student progress and programs to improve student achievement.

If your district does not have a parent training program, meet with the school board, superintendent and Title I office and insist on the importance of good training and information for parents. Call the state Title I office and request that it develop a policy that encourages school districts to support parent training. To make your case, use "Engaging Families to Improve Achievement: Advice from the Research," page 22.

The Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs), also funded under NCLB, Title V, are an additional training resource. Each state has at least one PIRC, and PIRC are charged with providing training and information to parents, including information about Title I. Districts not wanting to develop their own programs can contract with PIRCs to offer training. A list of all state PIRCs can be found at [www.ncpie.org/AboutNCPIE/StateParentInformationResourceCenters.html](http://www.ncpie.org/AboutNCPIE/StateParentInformationResourceCenters.html).

Additional federal funds might be available for parent training through Title II (professional development), Title III (English Language Acquisition), Title IV (21st Century Community Learning Centers), and the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program — as well as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which serves students identified with disabilities.

For more information about high-quality training programs that districts could use, contact Parent Leadership Associates at [www.plassociates.org](http://www.plassociates.org).

4. Identify what actions and supports parents and teachers think are needed to improve achievement. Make sure that families are getting information, materials and training to help their students with complex subjects, such as math or science. The compact should describe what support the school will offer and how families will use that support.
5. Use student test data to decide what areas to focus on each year.
6. Specify what is expected of parents. This could include, for example, a statement that families will use the information and materials that teachers send home to help their children, or that families will limit TV watching to one hour a day.

**Leverage Point #3: District Policy. Every school district must have a written Title I parent involvement policy that is developed with and approved by parents, and evaluated every year. This policy must spell out how the district will engage parents in developing its Title I plan and how it will help parents gain the knowledge and skills to be involved effectively in decisions about the program and in the schools.**

### What the Law Says

“Each (district) that receives funds (under Title I) shall *develop jointly with, agree on with, and distribute to*, parents of participating children a written parent involvement policy.” (sec. 1118 (2), emphasis added) The policy must be evaluated, in consultation with parents, every year. The law

also says that districts may appoint a district parent advisory council.

A policy is a public document that commits a district to certain goals and actions. It also lays out what is acceptable procedure and practice. If a district policy says that parents may attend staff development sessions, for example, schools are obligated to follow this policy. This policy is the basic framework for parent involvement in your school district. The changes made by NCLB to the Title I law in 2001 certainly will require a full review of the current policy.

The district policy must describe how the district will:

- involve parents in developing and approving the Title I plan;
- involve parents in the process of school review and improvement;
- obtain parent approval of the district’s Title I plan and over how funds for parent involvement will be spent;
- provide support necessary to help Title I schools plan and implement effective parent involvement activities to improve student achievement; and
- build the schools’ and parents’ capacity for strong parent involvement.

The law says that a minimum of 1 percent of the district’s Title I funds must be set aside for parent involvement, and that 95 percent of these funds must be passed directly to local schools. The district, however, may use additional funds to support district-level activity in support of parent involvement. This should include districtwide technical assistance to schools having difficulty involving families, evaluation of the district policy, and training to build the capacity of parents and school staff to work together in improving student achievement. Schools also may use an additional portion of their Title I funds to involve parents. For information about funding, see “Follow the Money,” page 10.

### Steps to Take

1. Obtain a copy of your district’s Title I parent involvement policy. Make sure that it meets all the requirements in the law.
2. Look for specific, concrete language that spells out how the district will carry out the goals of the policy:
  - How were parents involved in developing the policy? How and when was it approved?
  - Is the policy available in languages and formats that all parents, including those with limited English, can understand?

## An “Unsafe” Label Will Trigger School Choice

Title IV of the No Child Left Behind Act says that any student attending a “persistently dangerous” public school must be allowed to transfer to a “safe” school in that district. In addition, any student who suffers a “violent criminal offense” at school may transfer. The law requires states to define “persistently dangerous” and report on school safety, including data on a school-by-school basis.

How was the policy distributed to all parents and families?

- Is there a process of school review and improvement? How do parents take part in that process? How will families with limited English be involved?
  - What supports will the district provide to help Title I schools engage parents in activities to improve student achievement?
  - Does the district commit staff and resources to build the capacity of school staff and parents to work together to improve achievement?
  - How will Title I parent involvement strategies be coordinated with other programs, such as early childhood programs like Head Start and HIPPPY?
3. Check to see what the policy requires schools to do. Does the policy apply only to Title I schools, or to all schools in the district? How will the district make sure that the schools are fully involving parents and families?
  4. Find out how much Title I money the district is spending on parent involvement. Has it passed on to schools at least 1 percent of the total district grant? Is it monitoring how schools are using that money? Has it reserved an additional amount for district activities? What are they?
  5. Find out what the district is doing to build partnerships with community-based organizations and businesses in activities that involve parents. These groups include local education funds; Boys and Girls clubs;

and local chapters of national organizations such as the Urban League, National Council of La Raza and the NAACP.

6. Ask when the parent involvement policy was last evaluated and who was involved. Who represented parents and families? What changes were made as a result of this input?
7. Insist that the district create a district parent advisory council. This council can assist in evaluating the current policy, oversee the development of a new policy and identify needs at Title I schools that the district should address.
8. Submit written comments if the district refuses to revise the policy or to make changes that parents request. The district must include these comments with its state application for Title I funds. Send a copy to your state Title I director. The state education agency can require changes in the district plan, such as a stronger parent involvement policy.

**Leverage Point #4: Report Cards. The school district must distribute a report card specifying how *every school* and the *district as a whole* are performing. This applies to Title I and non-Title I schools, as well as to charter schools.**

### What the Law Says

All states and school districts must prepare and distribute annual report cards, starting in the 2002–03 school year. The report cards must include data for the state as well as for each school district. In addition, districts must distrib-

ute report cards for each school in the district. This requirement applies to every school in the state, not just to Title I schools.

These report cards must include:

- achievement information broken down by subgroups (race/ethnicity, disability, income level, gender, migrant status, English language learners);
- percent of students not tested, broken down by subgroups;
- two-year trend data in achievement by subject area and grade level;
- graduation rates for high school students, retention and promotion for middle grades students, and a similar indicator for elementary school students, chosen by the state;
- information about performance of districts on AYP, as well as the numbers and names of schools identified for school improvement; and
- teacher qualifications, including percent of teachers with emergency credentials and percentage of classes not taught by “highly qualified” teachers — this data must be broken down by high-poverty and low-poverty schools.

The report cards may include information about parent involvement at each school.

### Questions to Ask

These report cards will provide many opportunities for parents and community members to ask questions of their local school leaders.

- How does the school’s performance compare to the district average? And how does



the district's performance compare to the state average, and to other districts with similar demographics?

- Do some groups of students score higher than others? Do more vulnerable students (students with disabilities, from low-income or migrant families, with limited English) have consistently lower scores than students from middle-class families? Do girls tend to score higher than boys, or the reverse? In what subjects do these achievement gaps appear? How persistent over time are they?
- Do some schools have much higher scores than others? What are those schools doing to obtain better results? Do some schools have much lower scores? What are the reasons for low achievement in those schools?
- What percent of teachers are certified in the lowest-scoring schools? What is the attendance rate? What are the achievement gaps between subgroups of students?
- Are schools making enough progress so that by 2014 all students will meet the state's academic standards? How many schools have not made AYP in the past two years? What is the district doing to make sure that adequate progress will be made in future years?

### Steps to Take

1. Examine how (or if) your school's Title I plan, or school improvement plan if it's not a Title I school, addresses the data in the school report card. For example, if reading scores are low, what is the school doing to improve reading instruction? If students with limited English are not making

progress, how will the school modify its program for English language learners? If many teachers are unqualified, how does the school plan to upgrade their skills or bring in certified teachers?

2. Ensure that the school report card is designed and written so it is understandable and that the school or district provides training for parents, teachers and principals in how to use this accountability tool constructively. Understanding the data and knowing what to do with this information is an important first step in developing solid school improvement plans.
3. If parents believe the school's Title I program is not adequate to improve achievement, submit written comments to the district Title I office. Send a copy to your state Title I director.
4. Examine how (or if) the district's Title I plan and school improvement plan (for non-Title I schools) address the data in the district report card. Use this data in the annual evaluation of the Title I plan and parent involvement policy.
5. Make sure there is an annual meeting for parents at each school to explain the district and school report cards, and how to interpret their children's individual reports on test results. Make sure the principal discusses how the school will address achievement gaps revealed by the report cards. How will the school use its Title I funds to improve achievement and reduce gaps? What other steps will it take?

**Leverage Point #5: Public School Choice.** If a *Title I* school has not made adequate progress over the past two or more years, parents have two options. They can ask to transfer their children to a school that is making adequate progress. Or they can request supplemental services and become involved in improving the school.

### What the Law Says

All parents in schools needing improvement must be given notice, in a language and format that they can understand, of their right to transfer. The notice will describe:

- the reasons why the school has been identified as needing improvement;
- what the school is doing to address the problem of low achievement;
- what the district is doing to help the school;
- how parents can be involved in addressing the school's academic problems; and
- parents' option to transfer their child to another school (with free transportation provided by the district) or to get supplemental education services for their child.

The regulations say that the district must take into account parents' preferences when assigning their children to a new school. It also must give parents information about student performance in the schools that parents can choose.

Title I schools face corrective action if they don't make AYP in the following years. Remember that a school is designated "in need of improvement" after two years of not making AYP.

- **After three years of not making AYP**, the school must provide “supplemental education services” to children who remain at the school. Those services can include tutoring, remedial classes, before- and after-school services, and summer school programs.
- **After four years of not making AYP**, the district must take corrective actions to improve the school, such as replacing certain staff or implementing a new curriculum.
- **After five years of not making AYP**, the school is identified for restructuring and arrangements must be made for alternative governance, such as a state takeover, hiring a private management contractor, converting to a charter school or significant staff restructuring.

For more detail on corrective action, see the chart, “If a School Is ‘In Need of Improvement’: Schedule of Actions,” page 16.

### Steps to Take

1. Find out how your school is doing. You don’t have to wait for the state to issue a school report card. Other Web sites have information about your school. Visit your state’s Web site by going to [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org) and clicking on the map. Or go to [www.greatschools.net](http://www.greatschools.net).
2. Insist that the principal or district inform you whether the school has made AYP for the past two years. The district must give notice to all parents in nonimproving schools, in languages and formats they can understand.
3. Schedule a meeting with the principal to find out what the school is doing to improve achievement. Ask questions like these:
  - What will the school do to close achievement gaps between different groups of students? (For example, if students with limited English scored lower on the state test than other students, the school should have a plan designed to give those students extra help. Your school will be judged on how well students in *all* groups perform, not just on the school’s average results.)
  - What is the school doing to recruit and keep well-qualified teachers? What kind of professional development is being offered to improve instruction?
  - Is the school eliminating low-level programs and giving all children challenging work? What is the school’s plan to make sure all children meet the state standards?
4. Check out the schools to which the district says your child may transfer. The district must give you information about how students are performing in the transfer schools. Ask parents at those schools if they feel the school offers a high-quality education and if their children like going to school there. Press for reasons. If you transfer, you will not be able to get supplemental services (such as tutoring) for your child.
5. If you decide to stay in the original school, insist on supplemental services for your child, and get involved in making the school better. You may have good reasons for

keeping your child in the school. Check your school’s written parent involvement policy and school-parent compact to learn about opportunities to be involved. Schools in need of improvement must involve parents in developing their school improvement plan. Ask how parents will be involved in developing this plan. Join the school improvement committee and raise the questions given in step 3 above.

**Leverage Point #6: State Review. The *state education agency* must monitor the school districts’ Title I programs to make sure they carry out the law. If the district is not involving parents, parents and community members should appeal to the state.**

### What the Law Says

The state education agency shall review the local districts’ parent involvement policies and practices to determine if they meet the law’s requirements. If parents feel that the district policy and/or Title I program will not be effective, they can make comments in writing to the district. These comments must be included in the district’s application to the state education agency. Every state must have a complaint procedure that parents can use. Visit your state’s Web site to find out more about it.

To promote parent involvement, the law also requires the state education agency to help local districts involve parents. States are supposed to offer technical assistance, collect research, and let schools and districts know about effective parent involvement practices. In addition, the state must

assist districts in taking corrective action in schools that do not make AYP four and five years in a row.

### Steps to Take

1. If you disagree with the district policy, make written comments. The district must submit them with its state Title I application. Make sure that the state Title I office knows about your concerns. Ask for a copy of its review.
2. Ask the state Title I office to meet with district administrators to discuss your concerns. Ask that you be present at the meeting.
3. Ask the state for a copy of the research and practices on parent involvement and school improvement that it is recommending to local districts. These practices should be based on current research and aimed at lowering barriers to involving parents in school planning, review and improvement.
4. If you believe that the state is not doing its job, appeal to the Title I office in the Federal Department of Education. Write to the U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202-0498. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327). Or visit [www.ed.gov/index.jsp](http://www.ed.gov/index.jsp) for more information.

See the resource section for a list of Web sites, including state education agencies and the U.S. Department of Education, page 27.

## If a School Is “In Need of Improvement”: Schedule of Actions

	YEAR ONE of school improvement	YEAR TWO
School (no progress for past two years in a row)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ School must give notice to parents, in a language they understand, explaining the options of public school choice.</li> <li>■ District may also offer supplemental education services to students in the school, but it is not required to unless:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All schools in the district are “in need of improvement” and</li> <li>• No nearby school districts will agree to take students from the district.</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ The school must develop and implement a school improvement plan that addresses the causes of low achievement. Parents must be involved in developing this plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Notice to parents same as in year one.</li> <li>■ School must also explain the option of supplemental education services.</li> <li>■ Must provide supplemental education services.</li> <li>■ Continue the school improvement plan as in year one.</li> </ul>
District	<p>The district must inform parents and public about the schools “in need of improvement.” It also must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Explain the public school choice option available to families in those schools.</li> <li>■ Make choice available to students (includes transportation to new school).</li> <li>■ Ensure that these schools get technical assistance to identify and address the causes of low student achievement.</li> <li>■ Review and approve the school’s plan for improvement within 45 days. The district may place conditions on approval based on comments from parents and community, or to ensure that Title I parent involvement provisions have been met.</li> </ul>	Same as year one, plus giving notice of and delivering supplemental education services.
State	<p>The state education agency must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provide technical assistance to the district/school, tied to the school improvement plan.</li> <li>■ Recruit and maintain a list of certified providers of supplemental education services.</li> </ul>	<p>Continue with year one activities.</p> <p>Additionally recruit and certify providers of supplemental education services.</p>
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Place their child in another public school that is not in need of improvement.</li> <li>■ Use supplemental education services at their home school, if offered.</li> <li>■ Take part in developing, approving and implementing the school improvement plan.</li> </ul>	Same as year one, plus enrolling child in supplemental services.

YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Notice to parents same as in year two.</li> <li>■ School must also explain that it is now subject to corrective action by the district.</li> <li>■ Supplemental services continue.</li> <li>■ School must implement corrective action.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Notice to parents same as in prior years.</li> <li>■ School must also explain that it must develop a plan for alternative governance to be implemented during the following year.</li> <li>■ Actions and services from prior years continue.</li> </ul>
<p>Same as year two, plus identify schools for corrective action. Corrective action must include at least one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ replace school staff;</li> <li>■ institute new curriculum;</li> <li>■ decrease management authority;</li> <li>■ appoint an outside expert to advise the school;</li> <li>■ extend the school year/day; or</li> <li>■ restructure the school's organizational structure.</li> </ul> <p>Can delay corrective action for one year due to unusual situations, such as natural disaster or sharp, unforeseen drop in financial resources.</p>	<p>Same as previous year, preparing a plan and making necessary arrangements to establish an alternative governance structure for the school.</p> <p>Examples of alternative governance include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ closing and reopening as charter school,</li> <li>■ turning management of the school over to a private corporation, or</li> <li>■ establishing a community-based management team.</li> </ul>
<p>Same as year two. Provide technical assistance on developing and implementing corrective action.</p>	<p>Continue all services from the prior years, plus provide technical assistance on developing a plan and establishing an alternative governance structure.</p>
<p>Same as year two, plus any new opportunities offered through corrective action.</p>	<p>Same as prior years, plus providing input into developing a plan and establishing an alternative governance structure for the school.</p>



## A Closer Look at What NCLB Says about Involving Parents

Parents are central to the accountability mechanisms of ESEA as amended by NCLB. The preamble to the law now says that the purpose of ESEA is to give

parents “substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.” Other titles of the law also have important parent involvement requirements.

This chart shows how NCLB strengthened parent involvement in Title I and widened its application.

1994 ESEA Title I	2001 ESEA/NCLB Title I
<p>Title I combined new requirements with those from earlier years. These apply to all <i>Title I schools</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ An annual meeting for parents, to explain the program and parents’ rights to be involved.</li> <li>■ A written parent involvement policy created with and agreed to by parents.</li> <li>■ A school-parent compact that spells out how the school and parents will work together to support student learning.</li> </ul> <p>The school policy should explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How parents will help write the school’s Title I plan and review the program.</li> <li>■ How the school will develop the capacity of parents and teachers to work together to improve achievement.</li> </ul> <p>The district also must develop a parent involvement policy in consultation with parents.</p>	<p>Several new provisions apply to <i>all</i> states and public school districts, not just to Title I schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ States and school districts must distribute an annual report card with vital information on student performance and teacher quality. These reports must be in terms families can understand.</li> <li>■ The local district must describe how it will work with schools to create effective parent involvement.</li> <li>■ The district must develop, jointly with parents, a written parent involvement policy.</li> <li>■ States and districts must review their parent involvement activities for effectiveness each year.</li> <li>■ States must collect and distribute information about effective practices to engage families, so that schools can encourage and expand parent involvement.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, all Title I schools must develop a written policy to involve families, and report on test results in “an understandable and uniform format.”</p> <p>Families in Title I schools needing improvement can transfer their children to better schools or request supplemental services. Notice must be given to parents every year that a school is in need of improvement and corrective action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The notice to parents must be in a format and language that parents can understand. It must explain how parents can become involved in addressing the school’s academic issues.</li> <li>■ School improvement plans must include strategies for effective parent involvement.</li> <li>■ Schools with problems creating effective parent involvement programs must get technical assistance from the district or state.</li> </ul> <p>Parents in all schools may ask to see teachers’ credentials. Parents must be given notice if their child is being taught by a teacher not credentialed in the content/class work they are teaching.</p> <p>(These requirements are contained in Title I, sections 1111-12, 1114-15, 1116-17, 1118, and 1119)</p>

Other titles in the law also have important requirements for parent involvement, summarized in the table below. These requirements apply to *all* schools, not just Title I schools.

Other Titles of ESEA	Key Parent Involvement Provisions Added by NCLB
<p>Title II: Teacher Quality</p> <p>This is a new state grant program that will provide funds to recruit and prepare teachers and principals, improve their quality, and reduce class size.</p>	<p>There was no teacher quality program in ESEA 1994. The new title:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Encourages state and local efforts to use technology to connect schools and families. (Title II-D, sec. 2402 (a)(8))</li> <li>■ Requires states and school districts to get input from parents in planning activities and developing the application for Title I funds. (Title II-A, Sec. 2122(b)(7))</li> <li>■ Requires school districts to include training for teachers on how to involve and work with parents. (Title II-A, Sec. 2122(b)(9))</li> </ul>
<p>Title III: Bilingual Education</p> <p>Funds will be awarded to states based on number of children with limited English proficiency (LEP).</p>	<p>Title III consolidates separate programs for bilingual and immigrant education. The grants to states require that funds be used to promote parent and community involvement in programs to serve children with limited English. (Title III-A, Sec. 3101(6))</p> <p>States can make grants that include community participation programs, family literacy services, and parent training to LEP children and families. (Title III-A, sec. 3111(b) and (d))</p> <p>The local plan must describe how the school district (or other grantee) will involve parents and the community in programs for LEP children. (Title III-A, sec. 3116(b)(4)) The school district also must effectively reach out to parents of LEP students to involve them in their children's education and assist them to become proficient in English. (Title III-C, sec. 3302 (e))</p> <p>Title III also requires that school districts fully explain the LEP program to parents with children identified as needing English instruction: How their child was assessed, the method of instruction, how it will help their child and requirements for completing the program. As in the previous law, parents may have their child removed from the program at any time, and the district must help them find another program.</p> <p>This notice must be given to parents in a format and language that parents can understand.</p>



Other Titles of ESEA	Key Parent Involvement Provisions Added by NCLB
<p>Title IV, Part A: Safe and Drug-Free Schools</p> <p>Funds will be awarded to states for programs to prevent violence and drug abuse in schools and communities.</p>	<p>This title retains previous programs to prevent violence and drug abuse. It adds a provision requiring states to allow students who are victims of violent crime, or who attend a “persistently dangerous school” to transfer to a safe public school. Each state will develop its own definition of “persistently dangerous.”</p> <p>State applications must describe how parent input was sought in developing the program, and how parents will be involved in reviewing local applications. (Title IV-A, sec. 4113(a)(14-15)</p> <p>School districts must use funds to promote parent involvement in the program, coordinate with community groups and distribute information. (Title IV-A, sec. 4115(b)(2)(B) and (D))</p>
<p>Title V: Grants for Innovative Programs</p>	<p>Title V includes Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCs), which used to be in another law under ESEA. These parent center activities must be coordinated with parent involvement efforts under Title I, and with community-based family services such as job training.</p> <p>PIRCs must help parents become active participants in developing and reviewing Title I school-parent compacts, parent involvement policies, and school planning and improvement. (Title V-D, 16, sec.5564(a)(1)(D))</p>
<p>Title IX: General Provisions</p>	<p>The general provisions apply to all titles in the law. For the first time, ESEA defines parent involvement as regular, two-way and meaningful communication about student learning and other school activities. (Title IX, sec. 9109(32))</p> <p>This includes ensuring that parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ play an integral role in assisting children’s learning;</li> <li>■ are encouraged to be actively involved in their children’s education at school;</li> <li>■ are full partners in their children’s education; and</li> <li>■ are included, as appropriate, in decisionmaking, on advisory committees and in other activities under Title I.</li> </ul>





## Conclusion

**T**he No Child Left Behind Act creates a powerful accountability system that parents can use to make sure their children get a high-quality education.

Over the past 30 years, education research strongly suggests that when schools support families to be involved at home and at school, students of all backgrounds achieve at higher levels. According to a new report from the Southwest

Educational Development Laboratory (*A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, 2002), when parents are involved in education, children do better in school and schools get better.

Title I funds can be used to engage families in ways that are linked to improved achievement. For example, teacher outreach to parents can

result in strong, consistent gains in student performance in both reading and math. Effective outreach practices include meeting face to face, sending learning materials home and keeping in touch about progress. Workshops for parents on helping their children at home are linked to higher reading and math scores. Schools with highly rated partnership programs make greater gains on state tests than schools with lower-rated programs. For more specific information about

research-based practices, see “Engaging Families to Improve Student Achievement: Advice from the Research,” page 22.

Many studies also show that students who are struggling in school, or are from low-income and ethnically diverse families, make the greatest gains when their families are involved. Although most parents are involved in their children’s learning at home, the extent of parent involvement at school often depends on school practices that encourage it. When schools reach out and engage parents, the level and quality of parent involvement improves — and so does student achievement.

The levers for increased parent involvement are there. Now, it is up to parents and organizations that support parents to take advantage of these opportunities.

### Now What? Clarifying the Law’s Intent

As readers likely have noticed, many provisions of the law are quite vague. For example, schools and districts must develop their Title I plans after “meaningful consultation with parents.” What level of consultation is “meaningful” — a 30-minute meeting with a handful of parents on the district advisory council to ratify a document that they have not seen in advance? Or something more proactive and inclusive? Also, school report cards must use language and formats that are “understandable to parents.” What does such a report card look like? Do they need to be written in multiple languages? Should they use charts and graphs — or is it okay to settle for a data dump that produces a document that looks like a phone book? And so on.

The U.S. Department of Education should have issued guidelines for state education departments that answer questions such as these. In turn, state education agencies should be passing on the advice to local school districts — and then making sure that they do what they are supposed to do. Make sure your elected officials (state and federal) know that these guidelines are important to you; in the past, the federal department and many state departments have dragged their feet in drafting such guidelines. In the meantime, use the “Steps to Take” advice in chapter 2 to help clarify for local school officials exactly what you expect to see, as a parent, for each of the six key leverage points.



## Engaging Families to Improve Achievement: Advice from the Research

Taken together, decades of research strongly suggest that families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life. When schools support families to be involved at home and at school, students of all backgrounds achieve at higher levels. In short, when parents are involved in education, children do better in school and schools get better.

According to *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, a new review of recent research published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (2002), students with involved parents are more likely to:

- earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs;
- be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits;
- attend school regularly;
- have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school; and
- graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

### Key Findings

**Families of all backgrounds are involved at home.** Several studies show that families of all income and education levels, and from all ethnic and cultural groups, are engaged in supporting their children's learning *at home*. White, middle-class families, however, tend to be more involved *at school*. Supporting more involvement at school from all families may be an important strategy for addressing achievement gaps.

**Programs and special efforts to engage families make a difference.** For example, teacher outreach to parents results in strong, consistent gains in student performance in both reading and math. Effective outreach practices include meeting face to face, sending learning materials home and keeping in touch about progress. Workshops for parents on helping their children at home are linked to higher reading and math scores. Schools with highly rated partnership programs make greater gains on state tests than schools with lower-rated programs. Practices like these should be included in a school's parent involvement policy and school-parent compact.

**Higher-performing schools effectively involve families and community.** Schools that succeed in engaging families from diverse backgrounds share three key practices:

- focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families and community members;
- recognize, respect and address families' needs, as well as class and cultural differences; and
- embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared.

### Effective Practices

**Effective practices can directly link the school's parent involvement efforts to student learning.** These practices:

- Include information on standards and exhibits of student work at open houses and back-to-school nights.
- Engage parents and students in math and reading games at Family Nights. Explain where students' skills need to be stronger. Use scoring guides while making craft projects to let parents know how to use them.
- Use the school newsletter to discuss test results and what students are doing to meet higher standards.
- Use the annual school and district report cards as a chance to have focused conversations with parents and community members

about each school's strengths and weaknesses — and how teachers, parents and community members can work together to make improvements.

**Match practices to grade levels.** Features from programs that are linked to gains in children's learning take children's age and developmental needs into account.

*1. Families with young children will benefit from:*

- home visits from trained parent educators with cultural backgrounds similar to their own, or with knowledge of their culture;
- lending libraries that offer games and learning materials to build skills at home;
- discussion groups with other families about children's learning; and
- classes on how to stimulate their children's mental, physical and emotional development.

*2. Families with elementary and middle school students will benefit from:*

- interactive homework that involves parents with their children's learning;
- workshops on topics that parents suggest, like building their children's vocabulary, positive discipline strategies and supporting children through crises;
- regular calls from teachers, not just when there are problems, about how their children are doing in class;
- learning packets in reading, science and math, with training in how to use them; and
- meetings with teachers to talk about their children's progress and what they're learning.

*3. Families with high school students will benefit from:*

- regular meetings with teachers and counselors to plan their children's academic program;
- information about program options, graduation requirements, test schedules and postsecondary education options and how to plan for them;
- information about where to find academic support, such as help with homework, tutoring, after-school programs, special classes, subject areas covered and associated costs;
- explanations of courses students should take to be prepared for college or other postsecondary education; and
- information about financing postsecondary education and applying for financial aid.

**Facilitate transitions.** Children of all ages do better when they make a solid adjustment to school. By adjustment, we mean that students feel comfortable and respected, feel they belong at school, and feel supported by teachers. Here are some practices that research suggests help students adjust as they enter a new school:

- Offer families and students tours of the school and opportunities to visit and observe in the classrooms.
- Meet with students and families at the feeder schools or programs to introduce staff, explain the school's programs and answer questions.
- Make home visits the summer before school starts to begin building a relationship with each family.
- Work with families to prepare children for the next level and help them plan for postsecondary education and a career.

**Develop families' sense of confidence and power.** Researchers call this "efficacy." Studies find that when parents have a sense of confidence and power, their children do better in school. For example, parents should feel they can help their children do well in school and be happy and safe, and that they can overcome negative influences on their children (such as violence and drugs), and have a positive impact on the school and neighborhood. Many practices that help empower families, such as these listed here, are required by NCLB.

- Engage families in planning how they would like to be involved at school.
- Consult a representative sample of parents and families, not just the parent-teacher association leadership, about school policies and proposed actions.
- Involve families in action research. Ask them to develop and conduct surveys of other families. Invite them to observe in the classroom, review books and materials, and visit other schools to gather ideas.
- Make it easy for parents to meet and discuss concerns with the principal, talk to teachers and guidance counselors, and examine their children's school records.
- Invite families to attend staff development sessions and faculty meetings.
- Facilitate families' connections with youth groups and programs for young people.
- Work with families to help them monitor their children's activities. Create a school directory so they can contact other parents.
- Offer workshops on communicating with their children about topics they suggest, such

as talking with children about drugs, dating, problems with friends or family, and values.

**Support families' efforts to improve the school and community.** When parents feel they have the power to change and control their circumstances, their children tend to do better in school. Their parents also are better equipped to help them. When schools work with families to develop their connections, families become powerful allies of the school and advocates for public education.

- Give families information about how the education system (and local government) works. Make field trips to district offices and school board meetings.
- Keep voter registration forms and information about local government agencies in the school office or family center. Develop a student-run voter registration drive.
- Invite candidates for school board and other local offices to speak to families at the school.
- Open the school to community meetings.
- Go with families to press local officials about needed funding, programs or law enforcement.
- Work with families to develop action research skills to document problems in the neighborhood.
- Invite local banks and businesses to talk with families about their services, loan programs and employment opportunities.

**Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families and community members.** All school staff, from the principal to the custodian, need opportunities to learn more about working more effectively with parents and community members. Design educational opportunities for all school staff that:

- help staff recognize the advantages of school, family and community connections;
- explore how trusting and respectful relationships with families and community members are achieved;
- enhance school staff's ability to work with diverse families;
- enable staff to make connections with community resources; and
- explore the benefits of sharing power with families and community members.

**Work with local after-school programs and supplemental service providers to link their content to what students are learning in class.**

- Form a partnership between after-school program staff and teachers. Encourage them to share ideas and knowledge about the students, observe each other at work, and attend staff development sessions to update and build their teaching skills.
- Inform supplemental service providers about the school's curriculum and learning programs (especially math and reading).
- Share textbooks and other learning materials with program staff.

- Give program staff information about students' progress and academic needs.

From *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement*, by Anne T. Henderson and Nancy Berla (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education, 1994) and *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, by Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp (Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002).

# Ten Things Every Parent Should Know about Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act

Note: Points marked with an asterisk (\*) apply to children in all schools, not just Title I schools. Points 7 and 8, about parent involvement, discuss Title I requirements, but parents can press the district to apply these requirements to all schools.

## 1. What will Title I do for my child?

Title I is a federal program that provides funds to schools with a high percent of low-income children. Title I schools must provide “high quality curriculum and instruction, in a supportive and effective learning environment,” so that all children will “meet the state’s student academic achievement standards.” Ask if your school receives Title I funds.

## 2. How will I know if my child is meeting the standards? \*

Each year, children in several grades take a state test to see if they are making adequate yearly progress (AYP). By 2005, all students in all states in grades three through eight must be tested every year in reading and math. High school students will have to be tested in these subjects at least once. Each test must be tied to the state standards and must use several measures, including thinking skills. Each child who takes the test will get a report on the results. The goal of the law is for all children to be proficient in reading, math and science by 2014.

## 3. How can I find out how my child’s school is doing? \*

Your school district must give out report cards on school performance, beginning in the 2002–03 year school year. The report cards should tell you how different groups of students are doing, by grade and subject. You can find out if your school is performing as well as, worse than or better than other schools, and if students are making AYP.

## 4. What happens if achievement doesn’t improve? \*

Schools where children are not making AYP must improve or face consequences. Title I schools that are not making AYP face consequences such as changes in staff and governance, or being taken over by the state.

## 5. What can I do if my child is in a Title I school that is not making progress?

- If a school is low-performing and not making AYP, you can request a transfer for your child to another, better-performing school. The district must provide free transportation to the new school.
- If you want to keep your children in the same school, you can ask for supplemental services for your child. Supplemental services include tutoring, before and after-school programs,

and special classes to help your child learn. The school must involve parents in developing a school improvement plan.

## 6. What if my child’s school is not safe? \*

If a school is “persistently dangerous” or if your child has been the object of a violent criminal offense at school, you can insist that your child be transferred to a safe school. The state must inform parents if a school is dangerous.

## 7. How can I be involved in my child’s school?

All Title I schools must involve parents and consult with them about the program and how parents will be involved. They also must:

- hold an annual meeting for parents to explain the program and parents’ rights to be involved;
- work with parents to develop and approve a written parent involvement policy;
- offer information and training to help parents and teachers work as partners to improve children’s achievement; and
- have a school-parent compact that spells out how the school and parents will work together to support student learning

### **8. What if the school does not involve parents?**

School districts must make sure that Title I schools follow the law. The district also must have a written parent involvement policy that describes how it will help Title I schools plan and implement effective parent involvement activities. If you believe that your school is not doing what the law requires, get a copy of the district policy to find out what action to take. Send your written comments to the district Title I office, then insist on a meeting to discuss them. If your district does not comply with the law, by all means appeal to the state.

### **9. What if my child has an unqualified teacher? \***

By 2005, all teachers in Title I schools must be “highly qualified.” That means being certified by the state in the subject they are teaching. All new teachers must be qualified starting in the 2002–03 school year. Parents have the right to see the teacher’s credentials.

### **10. What if my child has trouble learning to read? \***

Reading is the most important basic skill. Programs to teach reading in the primary grades (kindergarten–third grade) must be based on scientific research showing they are effective. Insist that your child get extra help, such as tutoring or other special instruction. The school-parent compact should list the kind of help the school will offer. Find out what reading program your school uses and ask for evidence that it is scientifically validated. Ask your child’s teacher for reading materials to use at home to help your child.



## Publications

*A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement.* Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, TX: 2002 ([www.sedl.org](http://www.sedl.org))

This report is a review of the research that links family engagement with student achievement.

*Closing the Achievement Gaps: Using Data To Drive Action* (vol. 1) and *Collecting and Analyzing Your School's Data* (vol. 2). Parent Leadership Associates: Lexington, KY: 2002 ([www.plassociates.org](http://www.plassociates.org))

A step-by-step guide to using school data to develop action plans designed to help underserved groups of students catch up.

*Urgent Message for Parents.* Center for Law and Education, Washington, DC: 1999 ([www.cleweb.org](http://www.cleweb.org))

This is a brief, full-color guide for parents about standards and assessment.

*Using No Child Left Behind to Improve Student Achievement: An Action Guide for Community and Parent Leaders.* Public Education Network, Washington, DC: 2002. ([www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org))

## Web sites

**Center for Law and Education:**  
[www.cleweb.org](http://www.cleweb.org)

This site contains useful legislative updates, plus articles on important education issues.

**Council of Chief State School Officers:**  
[www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org)

Through this site, you can link to the Web sites of every state education agency.

**Education Trust:** [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org)

This site contains useful reports on student achievement and a link to an interactive database (edwatch) on achievement gaps and national achievement trends.

**National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education:** [www.ncpie.org](http://www.ncpie.org)

This site contains bulletins about No Child Left Behind, plus links to over 50 national organizations that support parent involvement in education.

**National PTA:**  
[www.pta.org/ptawashington/index.asp](http://www.pta.org/ptawashington/index.asp)

This site includes up-to-date information for parents about legislative issues.

**Public Education Network:**  
[www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org)

This site contains useful information about advocating for improved public education, such as understanding a school budget.

**U.S. Department of Education:**  
[www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/esea](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/esea)

At this site, you can get a copy of the entire law, policy guidance and other information.

**[www.nochildleftbehind.gov](http://www.nochildleftbehind.gov)**

This site contains some general information about the law for parents.

**U.S. House of Representatives:**  
[www.edworkforce.house.gov/issues/107th/education/nclb/nclb.ht](http://www.edworkforce.house.gov/issues/107th/education/nclb/nclb.ht)

This site includes the legislation, the conference report, an implementation kit, links to speeches and reports, issue summaries, press releases, and other information.





# *Parent Leadership Associates:*

## *Creating tools to help parents become more effective advocates for better schools*

Parent Leadership Associates is a collaboration between the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and KSA-Plus Communications. Our mission is to improve student achievement by engaging parents to become decisionmaking partners in public schools through on-site consulting, technical support, workshops, conferences and materials. Our upcoming publications include:

### **Closing the Achievement Gaps: Using Data To Drive Action (volume 1) and Collecting and Analyzing Your School's Data (volume 2)**

This two-volume guide offers a step-by-step look at how parent and community groups can successfully use school data to develop action plans to help underserved groups of students catch up. With examples from communities such as New York City and Durham, NC. Volume 2 includes handy forms for local groups to gather and analyze data about their own schools. December 2002.

### **Parents and Teachers Talking Together**

A guide for facilitators, which outlines the four-hour workshop that the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence has used to help bridge gaps between more than 9,000 parents and teachers in the past eight years. With a chapter on the kinds of follow-up results you can expect. January 2003.

### **The Case for Parent Involvement**

Timely research documenting the impact of parent involvement on student achievement. Includes exercises to help parents identify what role they want to play (teacher, supporter, advocate, decisionmaker) and what kind of school they are in (open-door, partnership, come if we call, fortress). January 2003.

Check out our full menu of publications, workshops and technical assistance offerings on the Web ([www.plassociates.org](http://www.plassociates.org)) or call 859-233-9849 or 703-528-7100.



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